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PREPARATION FOR SCHOOL – HOW AND FOR WHAT TO PREPARE THE CHILD

Vanya Aleksandrova Stooimenova South-West University “Neofit Rilski” -
Blagoevgrad

2700 Blagoevgrad 9 “Zahari Stoyanov” Str.; e-mail vania_st1@abv.bg

ABSTRACT

There are certain terms, that even though they have their explanations and answers are still actual and can be re-considered in the context of the reforming school. Such are the preparation for school, the developing education, the crises in the development which draw our attention to new problems and challenges.

Maybe it is time for the school to start preparing to accept the child and to assure an environment that stimulates its development as a person.

Maybe it is time to change the approach towards the child, by using an education based on its positive and strong qualities, rather than on its weaknesses.

Key words: preparation group, preparation for school, developing education, crises in the development, stimulating environment

Theoretically, there are a number of problems which have been re-examined lately and which receive new, actual interpretation based on the rich experimental activity of academic bodies. Such is the problem for the preparation of the child for school, which can not be discussed adequately outside the context of the principles of the reform in modern education.

Taking this question into consideration, it is necessary to search for its interrelations with the formulations for:

- The relationship between development and education;
- Periodization of the personal development;
- New basic psychical formations for the period at hand;
- The regularities for the transformation of the different zones for potential development in zones for actual development;
- Goals and organization of developing education and traditional education.

We will begin with the discussion of the last relationship because it will allow us to disregard some outside requirements for the school system on one hand, and will guide us toward the original goals of the contemporary, rather, reforming school.

There have always been discussions about which of the functions of the school should be the leading one:

- To master a system of scientific knowledge;
- Preparation for various functions in public life;
- Preparation of the child for independent study.

These discussions have been intensified lately because of the fact that more institutions foreign to the system of the school pretend to take control of its functions and set requirements which can not be transferred as such to the school and the

teachers. Although it is relatively well structured, the school system can not perform all the functions of the remaining important systems around the child.

In this sense, the pretensions of the family to transfer all the obligations for the education in “acceptable” behavioral norms either to society for the preparation of the child for life in the broadest aspect of the term, or to employers for the education of specialists, which almost do not need further qualification, speak for the misunderstanding of the major dilemma standing before the school system. It has always manifested in several levels:

- Preservation of the established and development of the new;
- Following and considering the objective laws and securing the conditions for the development of the potential of the individual;
- Evaluation on the basis of the cognitive development or on the basis of the general personal development;
- Evaluation through comparison of the achievements of the different individuals or evaluation through comparison of the developmental growth of the individual alone.

In the last decades, several theoretical formulations emerged, which define lasting tendencies towards reconsideration of the basic functions of the school system, but also some towards redirecting attention for the search of basic points of intersection with other social institutions, which should secure the necessary conditions for the functioning of the global system – “Community” /examples of authors and works/

It is obvious that these tendencies are based on the assumption that the changes in the educational system should guarantee the preservation of the achievements, but also the balance of the opposing poles in the above-mentioned formulations. In this sense, the time has come for the re-examination of the system of scientific knowledge, which is gained in school, or rather, the need for the integration of the informational nuclei on another level to overcome the artificial fragmentation of the picture of the world, which is a whole and has to be perceived as a whole by the child. This is completely possible at least in informational sense, having in mind the level of development of scientific knowledge and informational technologies. It would be more difficult to overcome the organizational problems, which have to do with the operational management of the educational system such as:

- Organizational forms /units/ and their duration;
- Methods for the implementation of the organizational forms /units/;
- Forms and methods for diagnosing of the achievements of the subjects;
- Forms and methods for interaction with the other institutions;
- Permanent qualification of the pedagogical personnel.

The difficulties in the realization of this group of changes are economical, because of the superiority of the economic approach in contemporary society, and practical, because of the connection between the two basic scholastic groups and the pedagogic practice in the educational system.

The establishment of preparatory group/class as the first mandatory stage in the educational system is a positive change and it reflects some world tendencies. It is

also an attempt to moderate the economic approach in education. This fact gives a chance to the science of pedagogy to turn its attention to the real problems, which deal with the functioning of the school system. We have reached to the basic issue, which is the continuity between the separate groups and the need of preparation of the child to enter school.

The age for entering contemporary school is still a question of more social and economic decision rather than a psychological age periodization.

There are many attempts for age periodization of man's life cycle. According to I.V. Dubrovina, as a rule, every periodization is a function of the cultural norms of society, it has its values and standards, and it reflects the differences in the theoretical stands of the authors. She notes that even L.S. Vigotski makes attempt to classify different periodizations of childhood and he found that they are based on:

1. Criteria that are outside in relation to the child and its development.
2. A certain symptom of development of the child, depending on the accepted structural conception Personality of the author at hand.
3. A system of significant peculiarities of development as a process. [5. p. 328 – 333]

The preferred criteria for periodization define the general character of the type of periodization. In this sense, we could assume that the first type derives from the formulation that tries to give psychological explanation of already "differentiated" age stages, which have acquired social status, and not to give definitions to new ones. These are in fact "socially-determined" periodizations practiced in all countries, which are based on the traditionally established stages of the educational system.

Although they are based on formal structures and borders, these established periods have their objective existence and explanation. For L.S. Vigotski it is the close relationship between education and the change of the social position of the child. The positive impact of this type of periodization is in the direction towards the outlining of the tendencies in the change of the social position of the child, which in its part is determined namely by the character of upbringing and education. It is obvious that such methods lead to formally given parameters of child development, which narrows the "allowed" deviation in the process, i.e., what is acceptable is what corresponds to the next differentiated period, and all that is unaccepted in this sense is a subject for correction. In this way, the variation, the determination, the classification, the age characteristics in development prevail.

Typical examples of the second type of periodization are those made by:

- P.P Blonski who defines the periods in the development based on maturation and mostly of the teeth age;
- S. Freud, who takes sexuality as a formative factor for the all-round personal development;
- J. Piaget, who places great importance to the man's intellectual development;
- Periodization on the basis of speech development, according to Chomski's ideas;
- D. B. Elkonin, who takes the type of leading activity as a basic criterion.

Periodization based on one, yet significant, sign of development concentrate on the variety, differentiation, individualization, individual characteristics. Although they are common structural stages of development for every man, the issue for the personal development stays outside the reach of these authors. So the thesis that comes to the forefront is that the relationship with the child cannot be organized in a new way until all the characteristics of the structures of the personality for this stage are fully developed, which practically cuts the elements of the opposition Development – Education.

Examples for the periodization of the third type are:

- The periodization offered by E. Erickson. It is based on the differentiation of the significant features of development as a complex and multilayer process. For Erickson, development is characterized and is expressed in three autonomous but yet interconnected processes of somatic development, the development of the Ego and the social development;
- The periodization that is offered by L.S. Vigotski is based on the understanding of the concrete historical nature of childhood and its projection in the social situation of development for the particular age. For Vigotski, the social situation of development, i.e., this specific and unique relationship between the child and the environment, defines the dynamics of the age new formations, as well as the peculiarity of some integral structures of the personality.

The attempts for periodization of development of this type are an aspiration for the use of the holistic method for the analysis of the man's personality. The basic thesis of these attempts is that every stage serves a certain, specific task, which can be solved favorably or unfavorably in regards to the future development of the personality. Only going through every age period in full value prepares the child for the transition to the next and allows it to form the necessary for that psychological new formations. When the theoretical formulations for the crises in development are used for the definition of the borders of age periods in personality development, the negative as well as positive tendencies can be drawn relatively clearly. This is definitely helpful for the practice of pedagogical interaction, because these tendencies serve as a reference point for corrective activity in both directions.

- In direction of preservation and development of manifested tendencies in the development;
- In direction of correction of manifested negative tendencies in the development.

Such approach toward age periodization sets yet another very important problem to psychologists and pedagogues – the problem for the bordering, transitional periods in the development, which have similar symptoms and content and happen according to common regularities. One of these is shown in the fact that the changes that happen in the objective position of the child in the system of suitable social relationships have to be followed by parallel changes in the “inside position” of the child. Otherwise, the negative tendencies intensify and the child becomes “relatively unreceptive” in regards to educational influences.[5]

Special attention should be paid to the formulation that the borders of the different stages of development are a question of content rather than time, and are connected with the development of the basic personality changes. The consideration of a certain stage alone can lead to belittling of the major goal of education / the internal completeness of the personality/ to a stage one, which, although important, cannot substitute the final goal. [4] The analysis of the momentary condition of the preschool education is worrying. Tendencies for the transferal of organizational and content elements of other socially differentiated periods can be observed, which leads to ignoring of the child as a subject of its own activity and its personal development. In this way the preparation for school is easily and freely transformed from stage goal of preschool education to a final one. Gradually, the process of pedagogic interaction in kindergarten is also substituted by the process of education. All this is possible because of the fact that the basic regularities, which reflect the specificities of the preschool period, are not taken into account. It is also due to the fact that even in some scholarly literature the “specific” is shown as the addition of the age peculiarities to the terminological apparatus of preschool pedagogy. A formal and one-sided approach is applied to the connected, intertwined and mutually determined, specific, yet parallel, processes of growth and development, socialization, study and education.

The fragmentation and the independent analysis of age peculiarities, which are usually given in descriptive variant from the other mandatory element of the opposition Typification – Individualization and from the mechanisms of the leading activity, in the framework of which the parameters of the different zones of development are defined, is the other major problem, which has to be a subject of re-examination.

The age peculiarities have to be considered as possible and probable achievements and new formations, rather than as a fact for the respective period. It can not be expected that when the child enters its 7th year from its physiological age, all the average age characteristics, described in literature as typical for the “school period” in the personality development, will be present.

In this sense, it is very important for the adults around the child (parents and teachers) to realize that they are the ones, who define the parameters of the different zones of development. This is a very important fact not only for the development of the different functions and psychic qualities, but also for the personality as a whole. The problem is that the zones of actual and potential development of the personal abilities of every child also have an individual rate of manifestation. As a result of this as well as because of the formal construction of the groups and classes on the age principal, the child turns out to be:

- Either unprepared to enter into the scope of this amphoral zone and becomes described as unsuccessful, dropping behind the common rate of development;
- Or is already outside of its scope and loses interest in the offered activities, constructed on the basis of an already gone stage of its development.

In both cases the final effect on the personal development is negative. The fragmentation of the opposition Typification – Individualization does not allow the actual parameters of today’s possibilities of the child to be determined. The level of success in the leading activity can not be determined and this leads to the disturbance

of the process of formation of self-evaluation, which is accepted as one of the central personal formations. [11]

Practically, the work of the teacher becomes very complicated. He works with standardized programs, but the principles of the holistic approach toward the personal development are not introduced in some of these programs. The teacher also does not have the necessary tools for diagnosing the level of the personal development of the child. The school, even in the process of reform, does not give up its advantageous use of quantitative criteria for the evaluation of the achievements of the child and only as an amount of knowledge at that. This doesn't include even all the characteristics of the cognitive sphere of development. The psychic and social sphere of development, which includes the personal development and the interpersonal relationship, is totally ignored. These two spheres are mutually connected and encompass the changes of the Ego, the emotions and feelings, on one hand, and the social habits and behavioral models on the other. And it is exactly the level of self-evaluation and reflexion that stabilizes, regulates and organizes the motivational system of the personality.

For P. Nikolov there is an interconnection between motivation and reflexion because of the fact that through reflexion the self-knowledge of the concrete person as well as the self-regulation, which is based on the "balanced" rationalization of the achievements and weaknesses in the subject's activity, in the motivational process.

In order the problem of the preparation of the child for school to be solved in the child's favor the connection between psychic new formations and zones of development have to be studied. These problems and the one about the developing education that derives from it posed even in the works of L.S. Vigotski. According to him, this is "the most central and important problem, without which, the problems of pedagogic psychology not only cannot be correctly solved, but also can not be correctly formulated." [12]

On the basis of this formulation the number of authors and teams that are connected to it, further developed the ideas of L.S. Vigotski not only theoretically, but also empirically. In this sense, the studies of V.V. Davidov and V.V. Repkin deserve special attention. They attempted to determine the significance of the early school age in the general age system. They determined [2], that in the "contemporary conditions" this age can solve its educational tasks, if during this period the following basic new formations appear:

- The school activity and its subject;
- Abstract and theoretical thinking;
- Volitional control of behavior.

These formulations are of utmost importance for those working with the child in the preschool age because they show the landmarks for the zone of the most potential development of the child. These landmarks define the meaningful and organizational parameters of the processes of upbringing and education. According to the theory of Vigotski and his followers, the carrier of the activity is its subject and in this sense, is we want to provoke developing effect on the subject we have to organize the activity in such a way, that it should be oriented toward the regulations of development. In this

sense, the preparation of the child for school in “contemporary conditions” has to be oriented in the direction of:

- Development of the activity system as a whole;
- Development on the basis of the leading activity for the period of preschool childhood of the system of the remaining activities and mostly of the structural components of the school activity;
- Development of the elements of abstract and theoretical thinking;
- Development and increase of the degree of self-regulation of the subject of the activity;
- Stimulation on the basis of the evaluating mechanisms of the personality and the extending of the concept of the Ego.
- Building of objective self-evaluation and shifting of the localization of control in the direction of the internal one on this basis.

To be more correct in regards to the child and its future, we should make one more mandatory reservation and it is directed toward the need of reconstruction of the approach of the school itself toward the preparation of the child for school. This process can not be unidirectional any more. Maybe it is time for the school to start preparing to take the child as it is and to recognize in the same way not only the zones of its actual development, but also those of its potential development. Maybe it is time for the construction of new general goals of the school activity, one of which according to V.V. Repkin is the development of interest and the need for self-correction.

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